

## An Introduction From Bob Durand



### The Importance of Open Space in Our Communities

Protection of landscapes that represent our natural, historical, and cultural treasures is essential to our collective future and quality of life in Massachusetts. Whether the parcel is an historic landmark or a small field that simply enhances a rural road, open space helps our cities and towns prosper economically, offers much needed public space in our urban communities, and gives us a strong sense of place. In fact, open spaces help define our communities – just as much as a famous business, downtown, or an architecturally significant building – and are often the defining landmark of a community.

We must be careful, however, not to view open space solely as a mechanism against growth. In Massachusetts, our landscape encourages the natural and built environments to work in unison, not against one another. This model creates a unique, vibrant, and healthy place to live, work, play, and visit.

Over the past decade, the Commonwealth's residents have been challenged in new ways to protect those open spaces that define our distinctive New England heritage. The Massachusetts Audubon Society reports that Massachusetts loses 44 acres a day, or 16,000 acres annually to development, thus threatening the natural resources and rural character of our communities. While this may seem a small fraction of the state's 5.2 million acres, impacts from development are magnified when they are scattered throughout the state, fragmenting our landscape forever.

As we enter the 21st Century, it is critical that we take stock of our past accomplishments, reassert our core values, and commit ourselves to being stewards of the land in our cities and towns. Regardless of where you live, we all have a responsibility to continue the strong tradition of leaving future generations a lasting legacy of precious open spaces.

### The Role of Partnerships

The key ingredient to the success of protecting 100,000 acres of open space in a short amount of time is the many land protection partnerships across the state. During the last three years the agencies within the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA) have worked closely with the 140 private non-profit land trusts throughout the state, federal agencies, our Congressional Delegation, the State Legislature, Massachusetts cities and towns, and private landowners to give them the technical and financial resources necessary to help preserve and enhance the most valued landscapes in Massachusetts.

Partnerships have proven to be the most effective method to protect land. With today's increasing land values and a greater scarcity of open land across our state, it is critical that we all work together, sharing resources, to ensure our farmlands, forests, fields, scenic vistas, and historic landscapes are protected for future generations.

As a result of these valuable partnerships, the protection of 100,000 acres – or 2% of the whole state – was achieved in less than half the time required to reach the same milestone during the 1991-1998 period. Furthermore, these 100,000 acres cost the Commonwealth \$200 million dollars less than what was required to purchase the same quantity of acreage in the 1990s. This achievement is due to the millions of dollars that are added to state funds each year by land trusts, municipalities, federal agencies, and landowners, as well as an increased commitment to buying Conservation Restrictions (CR's) on properties throughout the state. EOEA will remain committed to open space protection and will work tirelessly to expand partnerships, allowing us to protect an additional one million acres over the next 20 years, thus creating a core open space network for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

*Bob Durand*

